

By Pearl S. Buck

ILLUSTRATED BY MARTHA SAWYERS

## VIII

LOUISE drew them apart at last. No one came to the door to open it, no voice called to startle them. But Louise came between them. Slowly Gray loosened the hold of his arms about Sara, and Sara felt them less close and for one fierce instant she tightened her own arm about Gray's shoulder. It was no use. Louise had come in through Gray's mind and memory. She was there as really as though she stood there staring at them. There was no denying her presence. So Sara, too, dropped her arm and stepped back to lean against the desk with both hands behind her lest she fall. She felt numb and dazed except for the burn of her mouth. Her lips were stinging. She touched them with the tip of her tongue and looked at Gray. He looked at her, his dark eyes somber.

"It's too late," he said slowly.

"Nothing is too late, so long as we're both alive," she retorted.

He did not answer and she saw that he was struggling with the thought of Louise. He would have to tell Louise of course. Deceit would be intolerable to him. She weighed her own conscience. It was as clear and light as sunshine. If Louise had really been able to love Gray, she thought, then she would have felt guilt. But Louise loved no one but herself. And to that self, Sara knew, she had done no hurt.

She cried out, "Whatever you decide to say to Louise, Gray, remember that I am glad that this happened. I love you. And I'm glad. It's as simple as that for me."

"Have you—a long time?" His eyes were steady upon hers, but she could see the dark red stain under his skin.

"I don't know how long," she said, "but I know I did from the day your cable came, saying you were bringing Louise."

She looked away from him. She was a woman naturally shy and she had spoken with an honesty beyond herself. She could do it because in some deep, hidden way she was fighting for her life against Louise. Yes, and for Gray's. "I can make him happy," she thought, "and Louise never can."

She gazed out of the window behind Gray. The flames were gone and there remained only the rolling billows of black smoke. The room was full of the terrible silence that always followed an air raid. In that silence her voice sounded too loud, too bold, but what she had said was said. Nothing was hidden. She was bare before his eyes.

And he, looking at her, felt nothing done and nothing made clear. He was full of distress and tumult. What did it mean that he could kiss Sara and find in that one long kiss the deepest union he had ever known with another human being? But the kiss was not simply itself—it was full of the knowledge of Sara, of Sara working at his side at the operating table, Sara examining slides with him with eyes troubled in reluctant diagnosis, of Sara eager and quick in all their work together, forgetting herself to be his extra hands, his other brain, his eyes and now his own heart.

He dropped into his chair, and leaned his head upon his hands, frightened at the terrible clarity of what he now perceived. Whatever he had given to Louise was not what bound him and Sara into one. He and Louise had never been one. There had been no knitting together of their separate beings. Marriage had not made them one. Nevertheless, there was marriage. Louise was his wife, not Sara. The fact rose before him, mountain high.

And all the time Sara stood at the window, waiting for him to speak. The quiet wind was moving the smoke solidly away now, and between the dark, drifting pillars she could see the hillsides. The people were coming out of their caverns and down again to the ruined city to take up their lives again as best they could. They would search the ruins and the ashes for any scrap of something usable and, with that, take up their lives again, as they had so many times.

"And cannot I?" she thought. She felt the old rush of her love and admiration for them hot under her eyelids. Let Gray decide (Continued on page 34)

Let Gray decide what he must do, she thought, and she could bear it somehow. Then he spoke. "What shall we do, Sara?" he asked. "Anything you think is best, Gray," she answered quietly

### The Story Thus Far:

TEMPORARILY in charge of a hospital in the Chinese city of Chen-li, while her chief is in America, Dr. Sara Durand carries on courageously—despite frequent bombings by Japanese airplanes. Her first real test comes when a noted Chinese guerrilla—Chen-ta, commonly known as "the Eagle"—brings in a seriously wounded Japanese prisoner. Assisted by Doctor Chung, of the men's ward, she operates. And the Japanese ("Mr. Yasuda," an officer of high rank) does not die.

Then Sara receives a crushing blow. The man she loves—Dr. Gray Thomison—returns from America with his bride! . . . From the first, Louise Thomison is miserable; she loathes the Chinese, she is terrified by the bombings. Also, she is lonely and bored—from time to time, she invites Harry Delafield, an attractive Englishman, to come over from a near-by port. . . .

Working through Doctor Chung (whom he bribes) Yasuda succeeds in inveigling Louise into getting his letters through, unopened. Assured by Chung that the letters are harmless, and that there will be no more bombings of the hospital, if they go through, Louise co-operates—quite innocently. And, to the

mystification of everyone, there are no more attacks on the hospital! . . . The letters contain outlines of Chen-ta's battle plans, brought to Chung by his brother, Chung Third (one of Chen-ta's men). . . .

Two women are in love with Doctor Chung: Doctor Siu-mei and a nurse, Ya-ching. Regarding Ya-ching as just another woman, Chung amuses himself with her for a time, then drops her brutally. Unfortunately for Chung, Ya-ching knows too much. She knows that Chung is giving certain pills to Yasuda—pills that enable the Japanese to have frequent relapses. She knows about Chung's brother. . . .

Together, at the hospital Sara and Gray watch a tiny Chinese airplane bring down two Japanese aircraft. Overcome with joy, they throw their arms about each other. And suddenly Gray knows that he loves this woman—this young physician who has worked beside him for so many months. As he stands there holding Sara close, Gray bends and kisses her. The kiss ended, he does not take his arms away. Nor does Sara take hers away.







The cast of *Meet the People* literally meets the people by coming down into the aisles to shake hands with the audience during the opening number. The girl in the foreground is Marie DeForest

"Elmer's Wedding Day" satirizes small-town life. The bride is Patty Brillhante, the effervescent groom is Eddie Johnson. Like nearly everyone else in the cast, they double in the other skits



Not enough money to marry Sue Robin is Jack Boyle's lament. She talks him into it, singing *A Fellow and His Girl*

Elizabeth Talbot-Martin shows perplexed Jack Albertson a ballet step. His job is to work it into a movie script

